

A Possible Criticism and its Answer

A number of orientalists have said that Islamic mystical and metaphysical doctrines have been borrowed from those of India, for Islam in itself is no more than a series of extremely concrete and simple beliefs and sterile forms of worship. The succinct reply to these claims is provided nicely by the words of the poet: "O Sweetheart, the difficulty is that you're no judge of words."

We, of course, in our answer to this criticism, do not wish to defend Islam from the point of view of its mystics and engage in proving the validity and originality in the face of Indian mysticism of the various ways which they have traversed on the spiritual path. In the same way, in our discussion of rational demonstration we were not concerned with analyzing and proving the validity of all the books on philosophy written by Muslims, and in our discussion of the way of the formal aspects of religion we did not declare as correct the way of the generality of Muslims whatever it might be.

Rather, our goal in this article is limited to a general survey of the original and genuine Islamic sources, that is, the Book and the Tradition, without concerning ourselves with agreeing or disagreeing with the activities and conduct of any particular one of the foregoing classes of men.

The claim of the above-mentioned orientalists is based upon the principle of evolution, according to which the development and perfection of a natural phenomena is explained in a scientific manner. This principle has been generalized to include every sort of happening in whatever sphere, even habits, customs and phenomena of a spiritual nature. Thus the root cause of every event is sought in preceding events. According to the same principle it has been said that Islamic laws were borrowed from those of the Romans and Islamic doctrines from the philosophical ideas of the Greeks.

These orientalists have been mistaken in their judgement in two respects. First, they have considered what is called "mystical intuition" to be of the same order as normal thought and hence they have imagined that the knowledge gained by purification of the soul is a system of poetical thoughts, much as if a poet with his overflowing and creative imagination and his eloquent means of expression could voice such concepts better than a mystic knower of the divine secrets.

A similar mistake is made in the case of revelation, which is the celestial perception of prophets and the

means of receiving divine sciences and laws. As a result, the basic source of Islamic doctrine and injunctions is represented as being Greek thought and Roman law.

This mistake is perfectly obvious in the discussions carried on about prophecy and the "mode of thought" of prophets. Moreover, the words and utterances which have reached us from the prophets—whether their claim to prophecy be true or not—openly contradict such opinions.

The second mistake is that, even if we accept the theory of evolution as proven and definitely established, this theory must not be taken as providing the reason for the manifestation of an instinctive drive. For, an instinct placed within a species' primordial nature at its creation will be manifested within each individual of that species (provided there be no external impediment), whether or not there is a precedent.

As a case in point it can be said that diversity in foodstuffs and the preparation of sophisticated cuisine was learned by the Arabs from the Persians, but it cannot be said that the Arabs learned how to eat from the Persians. Likewise, it can be said that democratic government with its manifold administrative organizations spread to the East from the West, but this cannot be said about the very art of forming a society and establishing a government.

In our previous discussion it became clear that the way of purification of the soul, that is, the spiritual life and mystical intuition, is innate within the nature of man; once awakened through the necessary groundwork and the removal of obstacles, it will direct man to enter upon the path of spiritual illumination.

Hence, religion, which by its very nature is concerned to one degree or another with the transcendent and eternal world, cannot but cause the appearance of certain among its followers, who, this hidden urge having been awakened within them, will sever all attachments with this fleeting world full of pain and hardship, and with the hope of absolute bliss and serenity will concern themselves with the eternal abode. And in practice also we see that in every one of the world's religions there exists a group enamored of the spiritual life and mystical way.

By comparing the presentation of spiritual matters in the basic texts of the world's religions it can be clearly observed that the texts of Islam have concerned themselves with the description of everlasting felicity and the external world more than the texts of other religions.

Therefore, the appearance of the way of the purification of the soul within Islam is perfectly natural, without there being the need for any relationship as to its origins with India or with any other place. Furthermore, as history is there to prove, a large number of the companions of 'Ali (the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet and the first Shi'ite Imam) such as Salman, Kumayl, Rashid, Maytham and Uways were under his direct spiritual guidance and instruction at a time when Islam had not yet reached India and when there could be no question of contact with Indian thought.

The fact that the chains of spiritual initiation (*silsilah*) of practically all of the Sufi orders in Islam reach back to Ali further corroborates this point.

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